

Chairman's Message

I want to thank my fellow governors for the honor of serving as chairman of the Southern Governors' Association (SGA) for 2006-07. For 73 years, SGA has represented the common interests of the Southern region by providing the framework for states' chief executives to work cooperatively and collaboratively to implement national policy and solve regional problems. As we have done for so many decades, I am confident that together we will accomplish many great things for the region in the months ahead.

This year, I have asked the SGA staff to work on a number of efforts on behalf of the 15 member states and two territories that comprise SGA. At present, SGA is in the early stages of developing a long-term legislative initiative aimed at creating equity in the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). I hope this initiative will bring together public and private sector organizations that share an interest in turning the program into one that equitably benefits low-income households in the South and across the nation. SGA also will continue its efforts to achieve equity in the State Children's Health Insurance Program (S-CHIP) program both to ensure that children are the priority population and to correct formula flaws that negatively affect funding to Southern states.

In addition, SGA is exploring policy options that will restabilize property insurance markets throughout the South. The aftermath of the 2004-05 hurricane seasons has drastically impacted insurance availability and affordability, particularly in Coastal states, and a wide variety of approaches are being considered to address this issue at both the state and federal levels. Simultaneously, SGA is examining the future of public safety communications and our ability to make our systems interoperable. Through regional collaboration, I believe we can offer real leadership in grappling with both of these issues.

Beyond its legislative work, SGA will build on its continuing efforts to promote economic development through cultural and heritage tourism. My chairman's initiative will expand the focus of SGA's "SouloftheSouth.com" project to give Southern states another unique opportunity to promote their tourism-related strengths. As Southerners, we have always felt a special affection for what we call a "sense of place," and our unique culture and heritage are important parts of it. I am especially interested in developing and promoting civil rights and music attractions that help tell the South's important and compelling story to tourists from all over the world as well as to our children and future generations. Through my chairman's initiative, my fellow governors will have the opportunity to talk about the many wonderful and diverse attractions located in their respective states, with their interviews published in one of the South's fastest growing magazines – Y'all, The Magazine of Southern People.

I look forward to working with our member governors in these important areas, and invite you to join with SGA to ensure their successful outcome.

Sincerely,

Governor Haley Barbour
Mississippi